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SUBJECT: TALKING THE TALK AND WALKING THE WALK DURING DRUG MONTH IN VIETNAM

1. (U) SUMMARY. June is "Drug Awareness Month" in Vietnam, and this year's campaign was billed as a success. Typically energetic government-encouraged anti-drug publicity events were accompanied by atypically successful drug trafficking enforcement operations throughout the country, with several provinces recording "biggest ever" busts and other provinces concluding trials in high-profile drug cases. END SUMMARY.

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FIRST SIX MONTHS OF 04: SO FAR, SO GOOD  
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2. (U) According to General Department of Police, Ministry of Public Security, in the first six months of 2004, authorities cracked over 5,600 drug cases, cleared 350 "complicated hotspots", arrested 8,758 suspects and seized 170 kilograms of heroin and 23,000 ATS tablets, an increase of 37.5 percent over the same period last year. On the treatment front, recidivism remains "alarmingly high - between 95 and 98 percent", according to an official from the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs. Drug treatment centers are struggling to cope. Nguyen Vi Hung, Director of Hanoi Department for Social Evils Prevention, said that the city was forced to cease accepting addicts into its rehabilitation centers temporarily due to overcrowding. Addiction among government employees is also an emerging problem. In Tua Chua district, Dien Bien province, police said that 24 cadres were addicted to drugs, including 8 from the district's education and training department, 7 from the health care center, and 1 from the district people's committee.

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GVN HONORS NATIONAL DRUG AWARENESS DAY  
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3. (U) In response to the UN's "World Anti-Drug Day" June 26, Prime Minister Phan Van Khai declared in June 2001 that the month of June each year would be dedicated to intensified counternarcotics activities. During the month, the GVN orchestrates a "Drug Awareness Week" to coincide with the UN's Anti-Drug Day. This year, according to Bui Xuan Hieu, Director of the International Cooperation and Project Management Division in the Standing Office for Drug Control (SODC) of the National Committee for HIV/AIDS, Drugs Control and Social Evils Prevention, SODC had coordinated various counternarcotics activities throughout the country. Hieu claimed that the month draws due attention from the public, leaders, and "brings about big law enforcement results."

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BROAD RANGE OF ACTIVITIES  
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4. (U) Various counternarcotics activities took place from June 21-26 throughout the country, including meetings, exhibitions, street parades, contests, and signing of pledges and coordination plans, according to SODC Police Lieutenant Tran Viet Trung. Trung said that these events were well attended by Vietnamese senior officials and leaders. Beyond propaganda events, the action month also resulted in many cases and arrests, noted Trung. Many of these activities were covered by Vietnam Television (VTV) and Radio (VOV), and highlighted in national and local press.

5. (U) In Hanoi, Deputy Prime Minister Pham Gia Khiem, along with Minister of Health, Deputy Minister of Public Security, Deputy Minister of Education and Training, and representatives from mass organizations, civil associations and the UNODC Country Office attended a large rally on June 26. Around 5,000 students from 29 universities and colleges in Hanoi Noi, with the message "say no to drugs", attended the meeting. Deputy Prime Minister Khiem stressed that the Government would will "mobilize the entire political system and nation to prevent and combat the scourge of drugs." Meanwhile, in Thai Nguyen province, about 1,000 government workers took part in a street parade. Mr. Do Duc Ngo, Vice President, General Labor Confederation, Major General Pham Van Duc, Deputy Director General, General Department of Police, Ministry of Public Security, and Mr. Nguyen Thanh Kinh, Vice Chairman of Thai Nguyen Party Committee and

Chairman of Thai Nguyen People's Council, attended the event. The leaders called on authorities at all levels to pay more attention to the drug fight among government workers. On this occasion, the leaders sent the participants a message "do not discriminate against addicts, be with them, educate and help them to stabilize their lives, quit drugs and return to normal life." Simultaneously, in Ha Tay province, more than 1,000 youth union members gathered at a big large awareness meeting in Son Tay town. During the day, all the union members signed anti-drug commitments, and distributed leaflets. The province now has 86 anti-drug clubs, 400 anti-criminal mailboxes (for residents to report crimes such as drug use) and 20 "friends help friends" clubs. In Danang Nang, the city youth union held a festival with the message "Danang Nang youth together push back drug crimes and social evils." According to Mr. Nguyen Thanh Quang, president of Danang Nang youth union, 800 members attended the event.

16. (U) In the common effort Working together, two famous photographers opened an exhibition of 500 photos featuring drug addiction and treatment. Separately, the Voice of Vietnam launched a competition for short stories about drug abuse. To highlight the "humanity" of drug users, VTV transmitted an exclusive program of addicts' music and dance festivals, sport and games in several drug treatment centers. To facilitate the nation's propaganda campaign, the Youth Union dispatched volunteers on a five-day mission to different drug treatment centers to disseminate anti-drug information and support recovering drug addicts. Also, Directors from Education and Training Departments in Hanoi, neighboring provinces and five universities signed a resolution on drug abuse prevention in all education institutions. Additionally, all of Danang Nang University's youth union members and students signed non-drug use commitments.

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DRUG BUSTS AND TRIALS AROUND THE COUNTRY  
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HO CHI MINH CITY

17. (U) According to the "People's Police" newspaper, on June 3 Ho Chi Minh City counternarcotics police arrested twenty members of a drug ring. The police seized 20.3 kilograms of heroin, USD 57,770, 14 motorbikes, 16 mobile phones, one car and six houses. The ring trafficked heroin from Nghe An to Ho Chi Minh City for distribution to "sales agents." According to Colonel Le Thanh Liem, Ho Chi Minh City Police Department, this is a big ring that has trafficked heroin from border provinces to the city for consumption. The bust had such an effect on supply that the retail price doubled, noted Colonel Liem.

18. (U) In another case, on June 16, Ho Chi Minh City Supreme People's Court handed down 9 nine death sentences, one life sentence and other lengthy sentences to drug organization head Ngo Duc Minh and his accomplices. The defendants were convicted of trafficking about 36 kilograms of heroin, 50 kilograms of cannabis, 6,000 EstacyEcstasy tablets and 15 kilograms of synthetic drugs between 1993 and 2002. According to press reports, this is a transnational case connecting Vietnam, Cambodia, Japan and the Netherlands.

19. (U) Additionally, Ho Chi Minh City People's Court tried an ATS case in early May. Chung Quoc Minh was sentenced to death, and 20 other accomplices also stood trial. According to police investigation records, between 1999 and 2001, Chung's organization trafficked 14,200 ATS tablets. The Labor newspaper reported that this was Vietnam's largest ever ATS case.

TAY NINH

10. (U) During a "first instance" trial (i.e., subject to appeal), Tay Ninh's people's court handed down 6 six death and 3 three life sentences on June 18 in a transnational drug case, according to press reports. The offenders were convicted of trafficking drugs across the border with Cambodia. The initial seizure on May 28 was 3.3 kilograms of heroin. Between June 2001 and May 2004, the syndicate trafficked 103.5 kilograms of heroin and 606 ecstasy tablets. According to press reports, this the biggest drug case in the province. Tay Ninh is considered one of Vietnam's drug "hotspots" due to its location on the border with Cambodia and the relative ease with which goods, including narcotics, are smuggled there.

QUANG BINH

11. (U) Police said that they arrested 8 eight people for trafficking 79.6 kilograms of heroin into the country from Laos. The seizure was made on June 26 after the police stopped two trucks at Cha Lo international border gate in

Quang Binh province, said a local counternarcotics policeman. Two drivers -- Hoang Van Tinh and Nguyen Van Duet -- and six passengers were arrested. The drugs were hidden among smuggled automobile spare parts, fabric, toys and scrap metal. Police also seized a large amount of cash in US dollars, Vietnam dong, Laos kip and Thai baht, in addition to a loaded handgun. This was the biggest seizure ever in Quang Binh, according to SODC

NGHE AN

12. (U) Colonel Vo Trong Thanh, Deputy Director of Nghe An Police Department, revealed on June 12 that the provincial counternarcotics police arrested 11 drug traffickers, including 4 four foreigners, and seized 7 seven kilograms of heroin in a transnational network headquartered in Laos. According to Colonel Thanh, the offenders had trafficked approximately 88 kilograms before they were caught. The "People's Police" Newspaper ranks this transnational drug case as the most important in Vietnam because of the cumulative volume of trafficked narcotics. In the first six months of 2004, Nghe An provincial counternarcotics police detected 290 cases with 349 offenders, and seized 23.892 kilograms of heroin, 12.556 kilograms of opium and about 5,000 ATS tablets. The province's border with Laos makes it a haven for traffickers.

SON LA

13. (U) According to Vietnam News Agency (VNA), on June 7 the provincial police cracked a major drug case in the Northwestern province of Son La. This is the biggest haul in the province since early this year. Police arrested two offenders and seized about 3.1 kilograms of heroin in Tan Phong commune, Phu Yen district. The two traffickers are Tran Van Kien, 29, and Tran Quang Thang, 35, from Hanoi. Provincial police and the Ministry of Public Security are further investigating the case. Earlier, provincial police seized 2 two kilograms of heroin in two separate smaller cases. In the first two months of 2004, Son La provincial police arrested 215 drug traffickers in 85 cases, seized 3.7 kilograms of heroin, 6.6 kilograms of opium, 1,677 ATS tablets and confiscated other equipment. According to SODC, Son La is another of Vietnam's hotspots. Drugs come in through the border with Laos, and travel down Highway 6 (AKA "the Heroin Highway") to Hanoi and other destinations for consumption.

HAI PHONG

14. (U) Between July 12 and 20, Haiphong People's court tried the city's biggest ever drug case, according to the People's Police Newspaper. The newspaper reported that 20 out of 23 suspects standing trial could be sentenced to death. The first member of the gang was arrested on April 30, 2003, in Le Chan district, Haiphong City. Before their arrest, the suspects had trafficked about 30 kilograms of heroin, newspaper reports said.

PHU THO

15. (U) Recently, Phu Tho police, in coordination with their counterparts in Son La province, detecteduncovered a huge drug case. According to press reports, Phu Tho police arrested Kim Van Phuong in November 2003 on his way from Son La to Hanoi, and seized 1.3 kilograms of heroin and 1.3 kilograms of opium. Using information from this first suspect, in July 2004 the police made 23 more arrests. The suspects confessed to trafficking about 30 kilograms of heroin thus far, through 7 seven provinces and cities, press reports said. In addition, the police confiscated 7 seven cars, USD 45,000, and 9 nine mobile phones. Currently, Phu Tho police are coordinating with the Counternarcotics police, Ministry of Public Security, to expand the case.

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COMMENT  
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16. (U) Though the usual caveats apply - Vietnam's drug forces are understaffed, poorly equipped, poorly trained, suffer from corruption, etc. - the numbers tell the clear story that, whether by intention or coincidence, Drug Month in Vietnam this year brought a sharp uptick in seizures and arrests. Combined with the effective mobilization of the powerful and pervasive official propaganda machine to spread the anti-drug message, these seizures and arrests could make a difference. This represents welcome good news that we can use as a positive message to sweeten the "Vietnam can and should be doing more on international cooperation" argument we have been making lately.

BURGHARDT